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ABSTRACT

High school students in vocational education programs can be challenged in their English classes with more than a basic diet of programmed instruction, worksheets, and tests. In between the drill and the practice required to strengthen communication skills there should be activities designed to motivate and encourage students to think beyond their eight-hour days and to develop positive attitudes toward their prospective adult lives. A variety of techniques to develop the basic skills of listening, spelling, and vocabulary comprehension, map-reading ability, and job-finding methods can involve and stimulate student creativity. Poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama could also be included in the basic English class. Moreover, being in a basic English class should not preclude students from enjoying the experience of legitimate theatre. (AEA)

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NUTS AND BOLTS --- AND BUTTERFLIES

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NUTS AND BOLTS --------- AND BUTTERFLIES

Nuts and bolts are the essential ingredients of my students' educational diet. They spend four and one-half hours of their school day learning vocational skills as diverse as carpentry and cosmetology, auto mechanics and accounting, food service and floriculture. In those laboratories they master basic skills for an entry level position in a trade. In their required academic subjects -- English and social studies -- they drill on basics some more. After school, most go to a part-time job, usually one of a routine nature.

Although these vocational high school students have the advantage of being able to learn a trade, they have much in common with students in lower-level, non-college-bound English classes in traditional high schools. Most come to English prepared to be bored, do worksheets, and see films.

While there are days when any of these three things may happen in my classroom, students seem to appreciate the fact that "English is the one place in the day where we do something different." And this is where the butterflies come in -- reaching beyond the basic skills to the area of affective learning. I am not suggesting a return to the nebulous course titles which masqueraded as English credits in the 60's. Rather I am suggesting that our so-called "basic" courses can contain far more enrichment and stimulation than they do.

By all means our students must strengthen and strive to perfect basic communication skills. Until my students have accepted the theory that "language is a tool" -- as important to their success as their micrometers or milling machines, calculators or curling irons -- we can proceed no further.

Concrete examples like this one (T-1) help establish a positive attitude toward language skills. This story tells of a seaman in the U.S. Navy who tried to repair a diesel engine by only following diagrams; he couldn't read the accompanying text in the manual. The result was the total ruin of a $250,000 piece of equipment. You are appealing here to things these students relate to -- true story, money, engine.

On a more personal basis I reason with my car-obsessed friends with an analogy based on my own mechanical ineptness. (They like the fact that I need their help when A-V equipment is uncooperative.) Just because I don't understand the principles of that internal combustion engine beneath the hood of my car, am I going to let that stop me from learning to use it properly and carefully to my best advantage? This must be their attitude toward language, I tell them, and I've never had a wise come-back for this one.

And so they write and they write, they revise and re-write and strive to improve their paragraphs, their reports, their resumes and business letters; they work at sentence combining and you know how proud they are when a paper comes back without a single "frag" or "R-O." They keep personal spelling lists, many words that are specialized for their own trade areas, and they drill one another on these.

In between such "nuts and bolts" assignments in basic English courses can be woven some "butterflies" -- activities designed to motivate and encourage these students to think beyond the eight-hour day and to develop worthwhile attitudes toward what direction their adult lives will take.

Our academic philosophy at Polaris (we are dealing with grades 11 and 12) affirms that ~~in addition to~~ as well as the basic competencies in our teaching discipline there are three additional areas toward which we should direct our efforts. First, a positive attitude toward the concept of work, both at the entry and career levels. Second, a healthy regard for citizenship and the value of civic efforts. Finally, the need to develop worthwhile

mind-expanding interests and activities.

Time is alarmingly short for students in their last year or two of formal education to help them become aware of the vast potential for enjoyment of life on a higher intellectual and cultural level. Vocational, non-college-bound graduates, no less than academic graduates, need this stimulation.

In short, if we don't provide any "stretch" for our students we will perish with them on an endless treadmill of pre-tests, worksheets, skill-builders, post-tests ---- and boredom!

With a bit of creative effort and no special budget or equipment, we can combine basic skills with these other dimensions. Teachers who want to teach, not just shuffle papers, can find innumerable ways to affect students positively.

To illustrate that skills need not necessarily be taught by sterile, impersonal worksheets, here are four techniques that have been successful for us.

1) On a day when you want to stress listening skills, try using a speech or a piece of literature that is only vaguely familiar to the students. You can devise your own listening guide, choosing words for vocabulary study you deem important and providing a balance of questions at both the literal and inferential levels. One such activity we use is an excerpt from John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. A recording of speeches by several presidents is probably available at your public library. Since our students will have some difficulty with Kennedy's accent, this seems to be an opportunity to talk about regional differences in speech. Students like to listen to bits of the other speeches and try to guess what part of the country the other presidents are from.

Moving on to the Kennedy speech, you can re-create that day in January that ushered in the era of Camelot. Use pictures from some of the excellent books that depict the 60's, or (if you're my vintage) describe it in your own words. Students can even envision the poet Robert Frost (they remember him from 8th grade -- that guy that stopped by the wooods in the snow). Make them see him standing bareheaded in the bitter wind, reading his poetic tribute from a fluttering scrap of paper.

The actual listening guide for the Kennedy speech should be given to the students only after vocabulary is discussed and they have heard the speech through one time without writing. Young people feel a sense of pride after completing this activity. They have been able to participate in a historic event with understanding. When the President reaches those memorable words, "Ask not what your country can do for you," heads nod in recognition of something familiar from childhood. They scribble their answers with determination. Teaching basic skills --- reinforcing desirable values. (Copies of this listening activity are available for your use.)

2) For a challenging task that stresses accuracy in spelling and precision in definition, try letting your students make acrostics. I recently asked my senior classes to devise an acrostic puzzle of 15 terms and a secret message relevant to their particular vocational program. If their puzzles were designed well enough and executed carefully, I would give them to their vocational teachers to use as classroom exercises.

We spent only a class period on this. Since many had never worked an acrostic, I gave them an example of one I had prepared previously concerning job applications and resumes. (A sneaky little review for them, also.)

They grasped the idea quickly and were soon hard at work listing appropriate terms, looking up correct spelling and arriving at brief, accurate definitions. They worked on these on their own time for a week or so until I set a reasonable date for their completion. Not one student out of three senior classes failed to complete a creditable acrostic. They then worked one another's rough copies, correcting spelling and errors in numbering. Although we are still in the process of having these typed, some have already been used as activities in the vocational classes. To say that the puzzle-makers are proud is an understatement.

Here is an example of an acrostic made by a student in auto mechanics (T-2) Acrostics can be made concerning any special interests your students have -- cars, music, movie titles -- or you could suggest students make one relating to another course they are taking -- government, for example.

3) Improving map-reading skills is an area where a personally-designed approach pays great dividends. It is easy enough to rely on a workbook full of maps of mythical towns and counties. But how much more meaningful it is to develop your own materials using maps of your own area and showing how to get from there to other parts of the nation.

It isn't really difficult to come up with appropriate maps which you can cut and laminate and use year after year. Students will often supply them -- especially those who work at service stations. Their managers sometimes will donate maps. Young people whose travel experience is limited will begin to think beyond the confines of their own county as they plan the mostdesirable route to intriguing places like San Francisco or Las Vegas.

I was never more convinced of the worth of this type of map-skill activity than when a young man -- 18 years old, a resident of the Cleveland area all his life -- was struggling with this problem: " Tell

what routes you would take if you were going to spend a week at Lake Chautauqua. Hint: Lake Chautauqua is in western New York State." John was more quiet than usual that morning, and his grease-stained fingers moved slowly around the map of the northeast U.S. Finally, he admitted his problem: "Mrs. Mote, I always thought New York was a city, not a state." He was incredulous as he watched me trace the outline of New York on his map, separated from northeast Ohio by only a small strip of Pennsylvania. Teaching basic skills ---- adding some stretch.

4) Just as using local maps is more desirable than using fictitious ones, so is the use of actual classified ads from local or nearby city papers in teaching job-finding skills. This is what vocational educators call "hands-on" experience, and it is invaluable in teaching young people to cope with the bulging classified section of a city newspaper.

Since the classifieds have a jargon all their own, it is wise to prepare students for this before turning them loose with the ads. Recently, a senior class did a review of these terms by preparing a bulletin board pre-test for the juniors who were soon to start the unit. Terms were lettered on colored paper and scattered at random over a background of classified ads. The answers were given underneath the terms when the students raised the colored strips. Colored pictures of people working at various jobs, cut from magazines, added to the interest and attractiveness. The juniors used this bulletin board as a learning resource; for the terms they couldn't guess, they copied the definitions the seniors had written -- in clear, precise terms.

The activity sheet we use with the classified ads is available as a handout. It stresses how to respond to the ad they select, knowing about agencies, fringe benefits, hiring practices, and so on. By using their own local paper, or one from a nearby city, young people add to their

general knowledge of the business area in which they will very likely work.

I might add here that there is a great deal of concerted effort among the members of our department to produce materials we feel are appropriate for our students' needs. This is our seventh year of operation, and we have built up files of suitable materials which we all share. The fact that we all have some common planning time is another plus factor in developing curriculum materials.

But let's turn from the strictly practical to the real mind-expanding activities -- the real butterflies-- that come from integrating the teaching of literature into these basic skills courses. Fortunately, our Board of Education embraces this philosophy and has approved our courses of study in which literature is built into basic courses for all of our students. Our Board members recognize that along with developing reading skills and building vocabulary, literature will expand the limited horizons of many of our young people and help them attain a value system with which they can cope with our already future-shocked society.

Daniel Fader's premise that today's generation is imprisoned by the present is especially true of these young men and women who enter the working world directly after high school. Thus, we should not deny them the exploration of the human condition that literature provides as a way to help them understand that world and to develop a perspective. A belief in the future is really necessary before young people can truly take advantage of the good in society -- including a skilled occupation and a lucrative job. Through literature students can experience situations similar to their own and beyond their own. Hence, they can understand the values and moral dilemmas of others -- in past as well as present situations. Is there anything more BASIC to human understanding?

I'd like to share with you some examples of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and drama and some ways in which we have had excellent response with our work-oriented students.

1) After that seemingly endless unit on job applications and resumes, put Langston Hughes' poem, "Brass Spittoons" on your overhead projector. (T-3) Have it there as the students come in and listen to their comments as you're taking attendance. Some won't know what a spittoon is, so it's helpful to bring a picture of one. The idea of a person being dependent upon such an unpleasant job grabs the students' interest immediately.

Have the class talk about the person who "lives" in this piece of writing. (You don't even have to use the word "poem" at this point.) How does this person describe his job? How does he feel about it? What does it mean to him? What eventual reward or improvement does he expect? Our students take awhile to understand the significance of "Hey, boy" and that the person is black. Once they have arrived at this, you may wish to talk about Langston Hughes and read one or two of his other poems.

The next day, the students write similar descriptions and feelings about their own work at their part-time jobs or in their vocational lab. Put the "Brass Spittoons" on the screen again for a suggested model. Note the three ways the speaker views his job: 1) what it's like 2) what it means to him in terms of money, existence 3) what it means to him as far as satisfaction and pride or hope for the future. Let the students draw these conclusions from the poem; then tell them these are the elements you will be looking for in their writing. Emphasize the need for tight, vivid use of language.

Your students will amaze you and themselves with the feelings that flood their papers. They <u>can</u> do more than write a,b,c, or T and F. Accompanied by pictures of workers, or, better yet, by photos of themselves

at work, these papers offer a valuable display of young people's abilities to express their goals and their feelings about their work. At our Open House next month, a display such as this will feature the photos and poetry of ten senior students. Let me share one or two of these with you. (T-4, T-5) Linking the value of written communication with the area of work is especially desirable in a vocational setting.

Other poems which work well with a similar approach are selections from SPOON RIVER, Richard Cory, Miniver Cheevy, Carl Sandburg's "Mamie" ; or ballads like "Sixteen Tons," "John Henry " Contemporary songs offer some useable lyrics on this theme, also. Examples are Billy Joel's "Piano Man" or Jim Croce's "Workin' at the Carwash Blues." Students might be asked to write a character sketch of these people or compose a dialog they might have had with a friend, boss or co-worker.

2) Most of our courses devote several weeks to the reading of a novel. During this time the novel becomes the source of vocabulary, spelling, grammar and composition, as well as activities in literary analysis and characterization.

GRAPES OF WRATH has been especially successful with our students. The suitability of the subject matter -- unemployment, family crises, unions, violence -- is undeniable. The fact that the setting is in the 30's accomplishes our goal of getting our students to look backwards in an attempt to gain some perspective. Although the book is long, the vocabulary is not difficult, once readers become accustomed to the Okie dialect. To shorten reading time for slower students, assign the intercalary chapters to the more able students to read and interpret for the class.

Steinbeck's earthiness appeals to these young people. The girls identify with Rose of Sharon, the boys struggle with every breakdown of

the Joads' archaic truck. We all admire Ma Joad's tenacity and determination to hold her family together. In discussion students shift from level to level -- from what happened to changes in the characters and relationship of their experience to the students' own experience. For example, Rose of Sharon -- whose dilemma is only too-familiar to our students. Would she take her husband back? What would their relationship be? What would you do? Would your family stand by you as Rose of Sharon's did?

Literature is fun and projects based upon what they read have a special appeal for vocationally-oriented students. Many times they can apply their own particular skills to advantage in their English class. For example, two drafting students produced a large wall map of the Southwest on which the class mapped the tormented route of the Joad family. Commercial art students added drawings of incidents at points where they occurred to help the novel come to life in our classroom.

As an oral project, an auto mechanics student stood at my podium in a battered felt hat and bib overalls (and grease-stained hands) and, as Tom Joad, described his struggles with that antiquated Hudson which bore the Joads and their belongings across Route 66. A young woman from a Child Care program poured out in a diary the poignant feelings of Rose of Sharon as she awaits the birth of her child.

Such projects are the "dessert" course of reading a novel, but if students select one early in the reading, the project becomes a prime motivator for "making it through" the book. Projects should be of high quality, however. I think I unconsciously add this caution because of an incident I remember from graduate school. The class was meeting in an English classroom at the local high school which during the day must have been occupied by students reading HUCKLEBERRY FINN. Crudely-fashioned rafts and riverboats were displayed in every corner of the room. The professor seized on this opportunity for a half-hour's ranting admonishment that"teachers should not reduce Mark Twain to popsicle sticks."

If your teaching load does not allow time to make study guides, vocabulary and literary analysis lessons, or lists of suggested projects, there are now excellent such materials available from publishers. These are in the form of duplicating masters which you can use "as is" or incorporate them with some materials of your own design.

3) Reading a well-written non-fiction work can be valuable in helping the student develop style and conciseness in writing. One of the most successful works we have used to captivate students' interest and involvement is Walter Lord's A NIGHT TO REMEMBER. The fact that it is a true story of a disaster appeals to these young people, and the current effort to locate the TITANIC's remains heightens interest.

Since this book is crammed with innumerable facts and personalities, a thematic approach is useful. From the actions of the persons involved in that fateful night in April, 1912, come a number of common themes concerning ways people react in times of stress and danger. (T-7) We prepared a slide-tape presentation to introduce the definitions and give examples of these concepts from everyday life. Readers then encounter these common elements of human behavior among the passengers, crew, and owners of the TITANIC. They also recognize these same concepts in contemporary disaster books and films.

Again, we use the same basic skills approach. Yet we seize upon every opportunity to help our young readers understand the climate of thought in which this diaster occurred -- the attitudes of class-consciousness, for example, or the blind faith in "a ship which God himself could not sink."

Projects that result from reading A NIGHT TO REMEMBER may range from wall maps of the North Atlantic showing the location of the ill-fated TITANIC and all of the surrounding ships; taped interviews of "survivors" as they disembarked in New York; vehement letters

to the White Star Line concerning the senselessness of the tragedy. Some students become "hooked" (as I am) on the fascination and awesomeness of that great ship lying beneath the Atlantic. They go to the public libraries and read microfilms of the tragedy as described in the Cleveland newspapers. When they spend their money to make photocopies of these stories to bring to class, I'm convinced they're on their way to becoming real TITANIC buffs. Last year a student brought in the VTS of RAISE THE TITANIC. Time didn't permit showing it in its entirety, so he reviewed it for the class and showed excerpts which he selected. After reading Walter Lord's book, the class was so familiar and involved with the TITANIC that they actually cheered when they saw it raised in the movie. Though they all knew it was fiction, they wished fervently that it were true.

No genre of literature better accomplishes some of the affective goals I have described than drama. It literally pushes students out of the framework of their own world to identify with others totally. Because we live in an area that abounds with opportunities to experience live theatre -- countless community and college productions as well as professional ones -- this is an awareness and experience especially worth encouraging. Groundwork must be carefully laid, however, to help prepare students for the restrictions presented by stage productions. One such technique is to have them adapt a favorite short story for the stage. They need not write the entire play; only a scene or two will give them some experience with writing dialogue. They should, however, outline plans for the various scenes and describe the sets required. Further introduction to theatre can be accomplished through some of the excellent media kits available. Our work-oriented people relate to the technical side of theatre; this is a way to awaken their interest in something they have probably never experienced.

Before beginning to read a play with which the students are unfamiliar, it is helpful to let them listen to the opening scene as presented on tape by professionals. These are usually available at public libraries if your department does not own them. By listening and following the script, the readers grasp the characters and situation more quickly and will, thus, read their assigned parts with more meaning. What about the less able readers, you're asking? You know who they are, and you will help them gain confidence by assigning them shorter parts, yet still requiring them to participate. If you have an entire class of such readers, there are frequently shortened and simplified versions of well-known plays in some of the monthly literary magazines for students. Some schools keep class sets of these intact for use in subsequent years.

In heterogeneously-grouped classes, we have had particular success with OUR TOWN, THE GLASS MENAGERIE, OF MICE AND MEN, and DEATH OF A SALESMAN. If time allows,reading a comedy such as HARVEY or ARSENIC AND OLD LACE is advisable before attempting one of the more serious plays. This will give the group some confidence with play-reading before attacking one which requires more critical thought.

Sometimes student enthusiasm can be contagious -- even by their families. After the first televised presentation of OUR TOWN, which occurred soon after our students had read the play, a number of them reported interesting their entire families in watching it on TV. Their pride in being able to explain and interpret the drama at home was evident; they valued their classroom experience.

Field trips are the icing on the cake in developing an appreciation of the theatre. If you live near a college, arrange a visit to the drama center's set shop, wardrobe shop, make-up rooms. When I take our vocational students to the Baldwin-Wallace College Theatre, I am

amazed by the in-depth, technical questions asked by these students who are actively engaged in carpentry, fashions, cosmetology, ~~carpentry~~ electricity. If the set is up for a play in progress, perhaps the class will be allowed to actually walk about onstage, examine the props, have the lighting and sound systems explained to them, and sense the herculean concerted effort that is involved in staging a production.

The high point of experience is in taking a group to see a live play. Although they may spend as much as $15 for a ticket to a rock concert, most of these young people have never seen the inside of a legitimate theater. Don't pass up this opportunity for them because you shudder to think how they might dress or behave; you have plenty of time beforehand for some direction on theater etiquette.

We are particularly fortunate in that the Cleveland Play House offers special matinees which ^ into the students' day and their finances. The most enjoyable one we experienced was a premiere adaptation of WUTHERING HEIGHTS. At first, I feared our twentieth-century suburbanites might not relate to the moors of England in a time so totally unfamiliar to them. Yet, seeing this play performed live before their eyes by real actors, was a revelation to them. References to Catherine and Heathcliff were frequent in class discussions for the rest of the year. Appreciation for the excellent staging and extraordinary special effects could not be ignored or taken for granted as with films or television. The students were there, involved in the entire production, until the final curtain call.

Theater experience for the class broadened still further as some students chose to attend other plays being presented in the area to fulfil an independent study requirement. As they reviewed what they had seen for the class and passed around programs, these young people were exposed to a wide variety of plays and musicals. One young man

went to see MUSIC MAN at the Community College without really knowing much about the play. He became very excited near the end of his review to the class. "All of a sudden," he fairly shouted,"the doors at the back of the theater flew open and the whole Midpark Band (his own school) came marching in playing "76 Trombones." His enthusiasm caused several other students to experience MUSIC MAN.

These are the butterflies -- this is the stretch we can give to those bored young minds -- if we will only challenge ourselves to look beyond the nuts and bolts -- the programmed instruction, the worksheets, the tests. Along with the vital basic skills, let us take every possible opportunity to supply that extra spark of motivation that will help these young men and women be more than employable welders, machinists, farmers, or secretaries.

Let us help them to become more aware, more sensitive and more tolerant individuals as well.